Thematic Debate on “Responding to the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century: Human security and the post-2015 development agenda”

Ms. Sonia Picado, Chair of the Advisory Board on Human Security

New York, 18 June 2014 (15:00 – 18:00)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today I would like to share with you the perspective of the Advisory Board on Human Security. The Advisory Board, which I am honoured to currently chair, is comprised of 13 dedicated members who bring a range of expertise from across the globe and who are deeply committed to the advancement of human security.

Established in 2003 to carry out the recommendations made by the Commission on Human Security, the Board is charged with two main tasks. The first is to advise the Secretary-General on the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, (UNTFHS). The second is to deepen the understanding and acceptance of the human security approach worldwide.

The principal aim of the Trust Fund has been to apply the tools and methodologies of the human security approach through the projects it supports. Over the years, the Fund and its partners have refined an approach that has brought new energy and ideas to tackling complex and multi-dimensional challenges.

This enduring learning process reflects the experiences of dozens of partners in UN agencies, Governments at all levels and civil society, including the community members themselves. It also reflects input from 216 projects in more than 85 countries.

From these experiences it is clear that human security is an effective tool for project design, strategic planning and policymaking across a wide range of thematic and institutional settings. From situations as diverse as violent conflicts, natural disasters, urban and rural poverty, the value of human security in strengthening targeted solutions to today’s complex and multi-faceted challenges has been highlighted time and time again.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to elaborate with examples of projects funded by the UNTFHS.

The human security approach has facilitated comprehensive and multidimensional strategies that capitalize on the comparative advantages of a diverse network of stakeholders, including Governments, civil society, regional and international organizations. Together, these multi-stakeholder responses have led to more effective, efficient and integrated actions by the United Nations system and its partners.

In Lesotho, for example, where an estimated 80 percent of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihoods, the adverse effects of climate-induced droughts have been hindering the country’s progress in a number of key areas, including agriculture and food security, poverty reduction, health and malnutrition. At the same time, developing long-term
and sustainable responses requires a comprehensive approach that accounts for the inter-linkages between food, health, nutrition and economic security. By simultaneously addressing the impact of climate change on people's vulnerabilities and by promoting sustainable drought resistant agricultural technologies in-line with local capacities and available resources, responses have not only reinforced the resilience of communities to the threat of climate change, but have also resulted in tangible improvements in the food, health and nutrition status of the participating communities in Lesotho.

Meanwhile, in the Balkans, while there is no doubt that countries across the region have made significant progress during the past two decades, the recent global economic crisis, along with continued displacement and inter-ethnic tensions in some regions, challenge future prospects. These lingering threats to human security underscore the importance of strong social, political, economic, cultural and legal systems that together can foster greater social harmony and give people the building blocks to live their lives with greater dignity, free from poverty and despair.

By addressing the root causes of the region’s vulnerabilities and by focusing on the totality of people’s well-being, UNTFHS projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia are helping to address the complete spectrum of challenges facing the region. Through these projects, efforts to foster social inclusion and to strengthen democracy go hand-in-hand with efforts to improve the daily lives of people, in particular, those most vulnerable.

Moreover, through a context-specific approach, the application of human security is helping to provide a disaggregated view of the socio-economic circumstances across communities. As such, these projects contribute to providing access to public services and economic opportunities in such a way that they help promote inclusive development and limit exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, gender, age or class.

To build on people’s strengths and aspirations, however, requires accountable and responsive institutions that are guided by the voices of the people. Through an inclusive process that is fair and results-oriented, the application of human security strengthens the social contract across the Balkans by promoting an environment in which all groups are invested in the future of its progress.

The final example comes from El Salvador, where growing violence, coupled with unemployment and early school dropout rates had threatened the human security of vulnerable communities in the department of Sonsonate. As violence takes many forms, such as gender-based, gang-related and organized criminal networks, to respond to it effectively requires a multi-stakeholder approach that focuses on its root causes and combines top-down institutional policies with bottom-up community engagement.

As learned through this project, without measures to bolster economic opportunities; strengthen access to adequate housing, health and education; and improve the capacities of public institutions and civil society to counteract criminality, the multidimensional requisites for curbing the rising epidemic of violence are not adequately prioritized. In particular, an integrated and multidimensional approach that ensures greater collaboration between local authorities, law enforcement, the judiciary and communities can result in a stronger framework towards promoting the conditions for peaceful coexistence.
Most recently, these principles were highlighted in the 2013 Latin America Human Development Report entitled “Citizen Security with a Human Face”. The report stressed that progress in the reduction of violence in the region will require a multisectoral approach that includes preventive measures, institutional reforms, sufficient public investment, collaborative partnerships and greater respect for human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The members of the Advisory Board on Human Security come from a diverse range of professional fields and bring a variety of experience from across the world. However, we are brought together by our common belief in the value of the human security approach.

Through projects like these, and many many others around the globe, we have seen that when the principles of the human security approach are applied together, as established by the General Assembly in resolution 66/290, the United Nations can rise to the challenge of today’s complex and interrelated threats in a more cost-effective, efficient and sustainable manner that empowers affected communities and Governments alike.

The Advisory Board on Human Security is not alone in its conviction that the human security approach can contribute to strengthening the work of this Organization.

An independent rapid assessment of selected UNTFHS projects, conducted in 2013, found that, compared to the single-support silo-driven responses, the human security approach has allowed for a new way of thinking to highlight the interconnectivity of today’s challenges.

The assessment also found that by ensuring the active participation of Governments and people in the design and implementation of projects, UNTFHS-supported initiatives provided strong evidence of a higher sense of local ownership and a greater determination to expand the gains made under the project to other groups and geographical locations.

UNTFHS-funded projects, however, constitute a small fraction of the overall work of the United Nations. Yet even at this very small scale, they demonstrate that there are new ways of addressing the challenges that face humanity. They demonstrate that the United Nations itself can learn to work together to develop comprehensive approaches to the panoply of multidimensional challenges to human security.

This message has been further reinforced by UN Country Teams, UN agencies at headquarters, non-governmental organizations, academics as well as Member States, in their submissions in view of the Secretary-General’s third report on human security.

In short, the projects funded by the UNTFHS have proven the added value of the human security approach. They have generated real positive change in the lives of vulnerable people. Their success has underscored that greater mainstreaming of human security can improve the operational effectiveness of the UN to address the multidimensional challenges of our time in a more coherent and consistent way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The effective implementation of the human security approach requires integrated responses that combine the expertise of the United Nations system. Funding such an approach presents
a challenge. Since donors tend to allocate funds to specific issues, it is difficult to adequately fund multi-sectoral and integrated programmes. While the UNTFHS was created for the purpose of meeting this requirement, concerted efforts are needed to bolster the Fund’s resources and expand the reach of human security.

We have learned a number of important lessons. Now, we should strengthen the Fund and broaden its financial support base. This Fund is not the only resource available to advance the human security agenda — but it is one of the most substantial. Now is the time to build on the progress, draw conclusions from the Trust Fund’s projects, and exchange ideas among human security practitioners, as we are doing so here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come a long way, and much has been achieved. But we also have a long way to go. For far too many people around the world, insecurity is a daily reality.

Speaking on behalf of my fellow Advisory Board members, we are energized by the impact of the projects funded by the UN Trust Fund for Human Security and those countries that have understood the value of the human security approach and integrated it into their national plans. We are also encouraged by the resolution of the General Assembly in September 2012 that affirmed a shared understanding of human security, as well as the growing interest in human security by those outside the UN.

We envision a truly global initiative to bring human security to all. To respond to today’s multi-faceted challenges, the United Nations must be built on a framework of partnership and prevention. We must ensure that today’s challenges do not become tomorrow’s crises. In this endeavour, we ask for your support, your ideas and your active partnership.